



Embassy of the United States of America Bujumbura, Burundi

March 7, 2013

Remarks by Ambassador Dawn M. Liberi 20th AMISOM Battalion Graduation Reception

Welcome and good evening.

It is my pleasure to welcome you this evening to celebrate the graduation of the 20th battalion of Burundian National Defense Forces supporting the African Union's mission to Somalia. It is an achievement made possible by a longstanding and successful partnership to bring peace and stability to East Africa.

I am particularly pleased to have with us Brigadier General Scott Smith from the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa in Djibouti, which provides military mentors to support ACOTA peacekeeping training in Burundi. These experienced soldiers advise the trainees on the latest battlefield tactics learned from recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. His command is also supporting training that will give Burundi's second combat engineer company the skills to overcome obstacles, like improvised explosive devices, found in Somalia.

Burundi's commitment to the African Union Mission to Somalia is a clear demonstration of its dedication to bringing peace to the region, saving neighbors from this suffering and hardship. I applaud the Government of Burundi and the Burundian National Defense Forces for responding and remaining committed to the African Union's call to aid Somalia.

Since 2007, AMISOM, has expanded the territory under its control, helping to bring peace and security to increasing numbers of Somali people. AMISOM's progress has permitted democratic processes to take root, culminating in the recent election of Somalia's president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. This progress has also restarted Somalia's economic engine – just last Wednesday Somalia exported cattle for the first time in 22 years.

Burundi has consistently risen to the increasing demands of the AMISOM mission and is now contributing 6 battalions as well as support personnel and staff officers to the operation. It is joined in this effort by Uganda, Kenya, Djibouti and Sierra Leone.

This is also a partnership with the international community, which recognizes that violent extremism is a threat to us all. The United States has remained a steadfast partner supporting Burundian peacekeepers through pre-deployment training, personal protective equipment and deployment support.

Through the State Department Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program (ACOTA), the United States provides 9 weeks of training to each battalion at a cost of approximately 1.2 million USD per battalion for a total so far of 103 million USD. This training

is provided by highly experienced retired military contractors and includes basic soldier skills, convoy operations, mission planning and the respect of human rights.

We are joined in these efforts by, the African Union, the European Union, the Netherlands, France, and Great Britain who have provided assistance through training, infrastructure improvements and financial support.

Before I close I would like to recognize that the new Somali government, represented here in Burundi by Ambassador Abshir Hassan Abshir, has already begun to rebuild its institutions, and the Somali National Army is now fighting al Shabaab alongside its AMISOM partners.

I would also like to recognize battalion commander LtCol Sylvain Nivyabandi, who has lead his 20th battalion during the rigorous ACOTA training. Following tomorrow's graduation, the 20th Battalion will join the Burundian AMISOM contingent in Mogadishu and carry on the difficult work of peacekeeping

Finally, to all of those invited, we look forward to continuing this successful partnership and to the day that the Somali people can enjoy peace and security throughout their country.

Thank you for your attention and for coming this evening.